Barry Tarshis on DMSO: The remarkable, safe painkiller Big Pharma doesn't want you to know about

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- DMSO (dimethyl sulfoxide) is an affordable healing agent derived from tree pulp, long recognized for its powerful pain-relieving, anti-inflammatory and tissue-healing properties.

- When applied topically, DMSO penetrates the skin to deliver relief and can carry other therapeutic substances deep into the body, making it uniquely effective for chronic pain, injury recovery and inflammation.

- When diluted and applied with clean materials like cotton or glass, DMSO is well-tolerated, with only minor side effects, like skin irritation, redness or garlic-like odor.

- DMSO is used worldwide – quietly – for arthritis, back and neck pain, burns, dental issues, headaches and muscle injuries. It also aids detoxification, immune balance and neurological recovery.

- Despite decades of promising science and patient success stories, DMSO remains sidelined in U.S. medicine – leaving people to seek it out on their own as a natural, low-cost, safe and science-backed alternative to pharmaceuticals.

In the mid-1960s, a humble lab chemical from the paper industry catapulted into the medical spotlight. Dimethyl sulfoxide – better known as DMSO – wasn't just another solvent. It was called a "miracle drug" that offers hope for people suffering from a wide variety of ailments, from sprained ankles and arthritis to spinal cord injuries and brain trauma.

Despite thousands of studies, broad international use and impassioned support from scientists and patients alike, DMSO never received full approval in the United States. It remained locked out of the mainstream, relegated to underground networks, feed stores and whispers in waiting rooms.

So what happened? Why did one of the most promising discoveries in modern medicine become a medical pariah – a treatment shunned and persistently ignored?

This is the story the late journalist Barry Tarshis tried to tell in his 1981 exposé, "DMSO: The true story of a remarkable pain-killing drug." Based on years of investigative journalism and unprecedented access to Dr. Stanley Jacob and chemist Robert Herschler – the two men who uncovered DMSO's medical potential – the book aims to do what the system would not: inform the public.

A cure from the paper mill

DMSO wasn't born in a pharmaceutical lab. It was a byproduct of paper manufacturing, long used as an industrial solvent. First synthesized in 1866 by Russian chemist Alexander Zaytsev, it sat for nearly a century in chemical catalogs, unremarked upon despite Zaytsev's article about DMSO's unique ability to dissolve both polar (water-loving) and non-polar (fat-loving) substances appearing in a German publication in 1867.

But that changed in the 1950s when chemist Robert Herschler, working for major paper company Crown Zellerback, began exploring its unusual properties. Herschler noticed that when DMSO touched his skin and that of his colleagues, they could taste "garlic" within minutes – a sign that it was quickly penetrating the skin and entering the bloodstream.

One day, after accidentally spilling a mustard-gas-like compound on his hand, Herschler instinctively applied DMSO. The pain from the chemical burn disappeared. The blisters vanished. That moment changed everything.

DMSO's unique carrier ability – transporting other substances through the skin and into the body – was both promising and problematic. DMSO could deliver drugs past the blood-brain barrier, but it could also potentially carry toxins. That duality would later fuel controversy.

A doctor's leap of faith

When Herschler met Dr. Stanley W. Jacob, a surgeon and cryobiologist at *Oregon Health & Science University*, their collaboration ignited a medical revolution. Jacob had been searching for ways to preserve organs for transplant. When he discovered that DMSO prevented ice damage in tissues, he began testing it more broadly.

What he found was astonishing. DMSO reduced inflammation, relieved pain and accelerated healing – often when other treatments failed. In one case, a six-year-old girl with crippling juvenile rheumatoid arthritis moved her neck for the first time in years, just half an hour after DMSO application.

Jacob began treating patients with DMSO. The results were often dramatic. He didn't claim it was a cure-all – but for many, it was the first real relief they'd had in years.

The science behind the hype

What makes DMSO so unusual isn't just what it does – it's how many things it seems to do. It is an analgesic (painkiller), anti-inflammatory, cryopreservative, muscle relaxant, vasodilator, a potential neuroprotector and more.

Studies show it soaks up free radicals – highly reactive molecules that cause cell damage and pain. It calms C-fibers, the nerve fibers associated with classic chronic pain. In animals, its painkilling effect lasts longer than morphine. And unlike opioids, DMSO is not addictive.

DMSO also weakens the walls of drug-resistant microbes, allowing antibiotics to work again against infections. In cancer labs, it is used to protect healthy cells from radiation. In emergency medicine, DMSO has shown promise in preventing paralysis after spinal cord injuries.

The side effects? Only a garlic-like body odor, occasional rashes and/or skin irritation. For most, these are minor compared to the relief it offered.

Safety concerns

Chapter 3 of Tarshis' book, often overlooked in modern retellings, doesn't shy away from hard questions. He explores early safety concerns, particularly a 1965 study in which rodents given extremely high doses of DMSO showed eye lens changes. Though this effect never appeared in humans, the FDA halted clinical trials.

Critics said the halt was less about safety and more about economics. DMSO couldn't be patented. No drug company stood to make billions. And its approval could threaten entire categories of expenses, less effective drugs.

Jacob and Herschler understood the need for regulation, but they criticized the way DMSO was handled. In Senate hearings, they testified that bureaucrats actively discouraged doctors from participating in studies, even intimidating some into silence.

A future still in limbo

More than 60 years after the discovery of its medical significance, DMSO remains approved in the U.S. for only one use: treating interstitial cystitis, a painful bladder disease. For other applications, such as arthritis, burns, injuries, neurotrauma and others, DMSO approval remains in limbo.

Tarshis ended his book with cautious hope. He didn't call for blind acceptance of DMSO. He called for scientific courage – to test what clearly warranted testing and to let the evidence speak louder than the politics.

Today, people still drive across state lines or go to buy veterinary-grade DMSO. Doctors who believe in its power still tread carefully. And patients still ask: If it works, why don't more people know about it?

Dr. Jacob once said, "Twenty-five years from now, people are going to wonder why it took so long." It's been more than 40 years since Tarshis wrote his book. And yes, people are still wondering.

Watch this video to learn more about DMSO.

An Introduction to DMSO

This video is from the Daily Videos channel on *Brighteon.com*.

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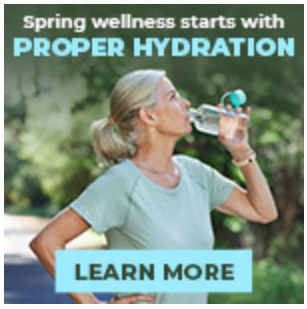

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